

Winona State University

OpenRiver

Volume 5 – 1997

1990s

Winter 2-1-1997

Big River

Reggie McLeod

Big River, reg@bigrivermagazine.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://openriver.winona.edu/bigriver1997>



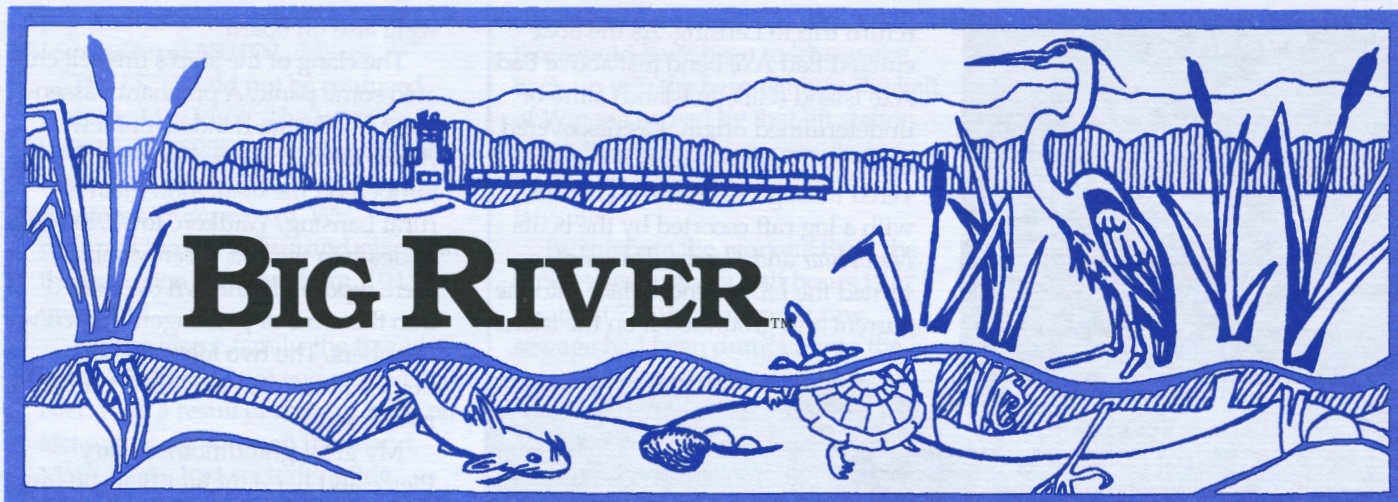
Part of the [Life Sciences Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McLeod, Reggie, "Big River" (1997). *Volume 5 – 1997*. 2.

<https://openriver.winona.edu/bigriver1997/2>

This Newsletter is brought to you for free and open access by the 1990s at OpenRiver. It has been accepted for inclusion in Volume 5 – 1997 by an authorized administrator of OpenRiver. For more information, please contact klarson@winona.edu.



February 1997

The monthly newsletter for people who live, work and play on the Upper Mississippi River

Vol. 5, No. 2 \$2.75

Excursion Boat Tragedy on the Mississippi River

By William J. Burke

The Mississippi River is enjoying a revival of excursion boats.

But present day excursions are a mere shadow of the heyday of the excursions around the turn of the century.

This leisure activity was not as safe as it is today. In the "good old days," boilers exploded, snags ripped hulls, and fires burned entire boats right down to the water line in minutes.

One excursion ended in disaster between Genoa and Victory, Wisconsin, on June 25, 1910, just 22 months before the *Titanic* sank in the icy North Atlantic. On this Saturday in late June the excursion boat *J.S.* departed Lansing, Iowa, carrying passengers upriver to La Crosse for a day of shopping and sightseeing, with dancing planned for the return cruise that evening. The Lansing Cadet Band was playing to raise money for uniforms. My great grandmother and her daughter were on board.

The *J.S.* was reported to be the most popular excursion boat between

Davenport, Iowa, and St. Paul, Minn. It was built in 1901 by Commodore John Streckfus as a part of the Acme Packet Company. His initials were used to name the boat, which was reportedly the first boat designed and built just for excursions. Some have speculated that the term "jazz" originated with the playing of New Orleans style music on the *J.S.* — first referred to as "*J.S. music*" and eventually shortened to "jazz music."

After the Civil War, increasing rail traffic in the Upper Mississippi River Valley caused great declines in the movement of people and goods by steamboat. As a result, many of these "packet boats" were converted to the excursion trade, which became the first large-scale tourism business on the Upper Mississippi River.

The Last Cruise

On its last cruise, the *J.S.* carried about 1,200 tourists as it departed La Crosse in the late afternoon for the

(*J.S. continued on page 2*)

Sewage Under Ice

By Pamela Eyden

What happens to the river when 750,000 gallons of raw domestic and industrial sewage spill into it in the winter?

Not much, apparently, judging from immediate reactions to the December 31 accident at Winona, in which a pipe at an east-side sewer system lift station ruptured. Sewage backed up into the lift station, shorted out a motor and wrecked a lot of equipment before workers discovered it. They had no choice but to divert the sewage into storm drains leading

(*Sewage continued on page 3*)

What's Inside...

What the Mississippi River Means to Me..... 4

Current Events
Troubled Bridge Dropped..... 5

River Calendar & Almanac
Grumpy Men, Eagle Watches... 8

(J.S. continued from page 1)

return trip to Lansing. As the boat entered Bad Axe bend just above Bad Axe Island (Gillette Island) a fire of undetermined origin was discovered in the hold of the boat as it maneuvered through the narrow channel with a log raft escorted by the boats *North Star* and *Harriet*. The pilot turned the *J.S.* around to face into the current and grounded it on the island

were also on board.

The clang of the ship's fire bell created some panic. A pregnant passenger, Mrs. Emma Randall, of New Albin, Iowa, drowned when she jumped off the boat. John Plein of rural Lansing/Waukon, Iowa, burned to death in the fire. Twenty babies were reportedly thrown overboard into the arms of passengers and crew members. The two log raft boats helped transport passengers off the island.

My great grandmother Mary Pierce and her daughter Blanche (my grandmother Nora's younger sister) spent much of the night on the island, which, like many islands, was covered with poison ivy. The spectacular

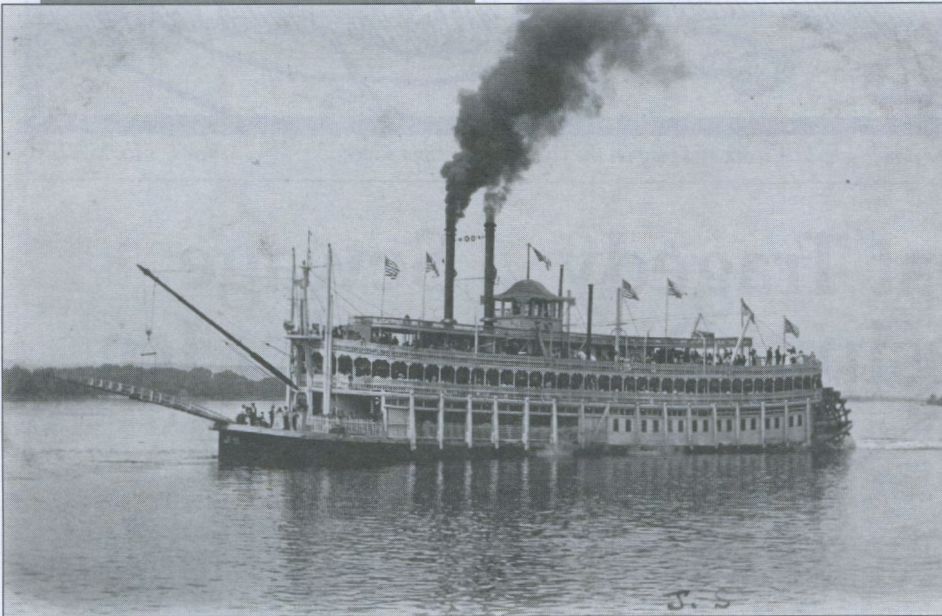
On its last cruise, the J.S. carried about 1,200 tourists as it departed La Crosse in the late afternoon for the return trip to Lansing.

blaze illuminated the adjacent bluffs. Observers reported a very eerie scene as the boat was cast adrift in an attempt to scuttle it in deeper water. However, the south wind pushed the blazing boat back onto Bad Axe Island. The boat burned right to the water line.

My great grandfather, Sidney Pierce, anxiously watched this enormous blaze on that moonless night, worrying that it was the boat his wife and daughter were on. Their log cabin at the base of Black Hawk Bluff was only about four miles away, across the river south of New Albin. How helpless he must have felt!

The Aftermath

The boilers from the boat were salvaged and no doubt reinstalled in another steamboat, as was common practice. The average life span of these early steamboats was only about three to five years, which was time enough for many such boats to



The J.S.

(photos courtesy of the Winona County Historical Society)

so the passengers could escape to safety. Reports at the time indicate that the *J.S.* was piloted either by John H. Laycock or George Nichols. Captain John Streckfus and his family

pay for themselves. The loss of the J.S. was set at \$50,000.

The J.S. should not be confused with the J.S. *Deluxe*. The latter was built in the 1890s as the packet boat *Quincy*, then salvaged after an accident near Trempealeau, Wis., renamed the J.S. *Deluxe* and placed in the excursion business from 1911 until 1938.

For the Pierce family, the tragedy of the J.S. fire did not end on Bad Axe Island. As a result of coming into contact with poison ivy on the island, Mary Pierce had such disabling recurrences of this affliction that the whole family moved to South Dakota to escape the humid air which aggravated her illness. They continued farming and expanded into ranching in their new home.

Many things have changed since the J.S. tragedy, including the moving of the navigation channel from the

*My great grandfather,
Sidney Pierce, anxiously
watched this enormous
blaze on that moonless
night, worrying that it was
the boat his wife and
daughter were on.*

east side of Bad Axe Island to the west side of the island.

However, one thing has not changed: the prevalence of poison ivy on our Mississippi River islands and the long-term problems it can cause. Boaters beware. ■■■

William Burke, a city and regional planner, operates W. J. Burke & Associates, in Lansing, Iowa. He also owns Mississippi River Tours, a land- and water-based touring service. He wrote Lansing, Iowa — the Story of a Rivertown in 1967.

This story is based on his historical collection with special thanks to the Murphy Library, University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

(Sewage continued from page 1)

directly to the river. The only alternative would have been to let sewage back up into the basements in the half of Winona served by that lift station. Not a happy prospect, considering the health hazards, mess and likely lawsuits.

By the time the workers fixed the pipe — seven and a half hours later — about 750,000 gallons of raw sewage had been dumped into the river. Estimates of damage to the lift station ranged from \$50,000 to \$100,000. No dollar amount was placed on possible damage to the river. In fact, officials from the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the City of Winona all quickly agreed that the spill was likely to have little impact on the river:

"There's a lot of water in the river. It would be diluted."

"At least there were no migratory birds."

"Cold water has more oxygen, which would lessen the effect."

"At least there were no swimmers or boaters."

But does anyone know what was in that sewage?

Nq. City workers were either too busy or they forgot to sample the spilled effluent, as MPCA rules require. The City will apparently not be fined or punished for its lapse. The *Winona Daily News* (1-7-97) quoted a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency official who struck a forgiving note in saying, "In this incident, sampling was not on their A-list. Given that it was an emergency on a holiday, they just let it slide. They probably should have got (a sample)."

Sewage often contains large amounts of ammonia, which causes a drop in the levels of oxygen in the water. This effect is not so great in cold water. High amounts of metals, on the other hand, would poison bottom-dwelling invertebrates, such as clams, mussels and mayflies, and through them, other creatures up the food chain. Ammonia and metals are

among the most troublesome of the likely ingredients of the nasty broth.

Plume of Sewage

The first people to comment on the accident took comfort in the fact that the dilution ratio was about 6,700 gallons of river water for each gallon of sewage. That sounds good. But the plume of sewage didn't mix with the whole volume of river water at once.

"Effluent doesn't mix with all the river water right away. It flows in a laminar direction, like smoke rises straight up on a calm day. It would have stayed close to the shoreline along the railroad tracks for the first few miles, probably until it got near the lock and dam at Trempealeau," said John Sullivan, water quality specialist with the Wisconsin DNR.

Neither the City of Winona nor the MPCA sent anyone downriver to check for visible effects of the plume of concentrated sewage.

Many agencies share oversight of the river. Sullivan was surprised that his agency was not notified about the spill. He first learned about it in the *La Crosse Tribune*.

"If it's a real spill, usually everyone gets notified, but this was a temporary bypass and it might have fallen through the cracks that way," he surmised. Nonetheless, communication across state and agency boundaries is not as good as it should be in cases like this.

"This wasn't a huge spill, but the problem is, if we can't respond well to a small spill, how can we expect to respond to a big one?" ■■■

Pamela Eyden is assistant editor of Big River.

Editor's note: Near press time the MPCA determined that the City of Winona violated two counts of its sewage permit: dumping untreated sewage into the river and not collecting and analyzing a sample from the spill. The MPCA will decide later whether to fine the city.

What the Mississippi River Means to Me

These excerpts from the winning essays in a contest in Buffalo County, Wis., are guaranteed to give anybody at least a couple of new reasons to appreciate the Mississippi River.

In 1541, Hernando de Soto stumbled upon the Mississippi River. It was later explored, in 1673, by Jacques Marquette and Louis Joliet. With them came the Voyagers and their heavy birch bark canoes. La Salle claimed the entire Mississippi River Valley for France after descending to the river's mouth in 1682. The history of the Mississippi River continued on to the time of pioneers and frontiersmen, as small villages sprang up along her banks. Later still, the Mississippi was used to transport logs to the southern parts of our nation and became a booming area of many lumberjack families. Now, I can vividly picture myself paddling along in a birch bark canoe or unjamming a dangerous pile of trapped logs. As I journey down this river today, I reflect on these past cultures and trends and how they have made an enormous impact on America as we know it.

Jennifer Parry, sophomore, Cochrane-Fountain City Sr. High School

Alma is a huge place for tourism in the summer with the Mississippi right at its side. Alma would not even be heard of if it wasn't for the Mississippi. It is Alma's pride and glory, but why not! I would be ecstatic to be located next to the United States' largest river. Each year, Alma's tourism is a huge source of revenue. People from many states come to see the Mississippi River...

Another eye-catching sight are the paddle boats, such as the *Delta*, *Mississippi*, and *American Queens*. I enjoy the music from the calliopes and the thrill of seeing the size of the boats...

I used to go to the beach and swim when I was younger, and that was a lot of fun. It was kind of like the Wave at Noah's Ark, but the waves weren't as high or fast. The waves in the Mississippi are natural, unlike Noah's Ark.

I have swum in the Pacific Ocean, been on a submarine in the Atlantic Ocean, but the Mississippi was the most fun of them all because it was so clean and didn't have a salty smell... I don't see how anyone in their right mind would want to harm the country's largest river.

J. Michael Weiss, eighth grade, Gilmanton Jr. High School

I've looked at the scenery and watched wildlife on the banks of the Mississippi River. I remember once seeing a fawn just eating grass along the river bank. Its beauty was quite breathtaking. Another time, I saw an eagle swoop down and get a fish. That was a magnificent sight! One time at our campsite, there was a raccoon making a lot of noise while it was looking for food. I am sure there have been many other interesting wildlife I have seen, but have taken for granted or do not remember at this time.

If you ever have the chance to go fishing, you should go on the Mississippi River. I think that fishing is so much fun. It is one of my favorite things to do. Some people think it is boring because they just sit there and do not take in the beauty of the river. There are lots of wildlife and plants to look at while you're waiting for the big fish to swallow your baited hook. If you are lucky, you will catch many fish. I have caught a few fish, but it takes patience, and you also need to be quiet.

Tracy Odegard, eighth grade, Gilmanton Jr. High School

Canoeing is another activity from which a family and friends can build fond memories. My family and I enjoy using the sandbars and beaches along the main channel for picnicking and swimming. Building a campfire, making s'mores, and watching the sunset from a sandy beach are things

that everyone should experience.

Raw sewage used to be a big problem; however, the Clean Water Act assisted a great deal in the health of our river. Even herbicide and insecticide contaminations have decreased thanks to the efforts of the Environmental Protection Agency.

Kelly Hansen, freshman, Alma Sr. High School

Growing up in a town next to this majestic and remarkable river has become a part of my life that I will cherish and remember for life. It would be a scary, and perhaps even dull, world at times without this river which serves the United States as one of the largest transportation routes, a habitat for hundreds of animal and reptile species, and as an amazing sight that has astounded countless people. The Mississippi River has been a lifeline for the U.S. for centuries and will continue to do so into the 21st century and for all eternity.

Jill Schaffner, junior, Cochrane-Fountain City Sr. High School

...If we do a good job of taking care of the Mighty Mississippi now, then our children and their children will be able to also step back in time and relive an interesting part of this river's history...

It is my hope that all people that live on or near the banks of the Mississippi will do their part to keep this river at its very best. If you have ever been for a boat ride or just sat along its banks trying to catch some fish, I'm sure that you will agree that it will take the cooperation of everyone who enjoys this river and all it has to offer to keep it at its best.

Sarah Ann Schaub, seventh grade, Alma Jr. High School ❧

The contest was coordinated by Brian Brecka, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources river biologist.



Current Events

By Molly McGuire and Reggie McLeod

Bass Champs

La Crosse, Wis. — Some lucky angler will catch \$100,000 worth of bass near La Crosse next year, when the "Super Bowl" of bass tournaments moves north of the Mason-Dixon Line.

The Red Man All-American Bass Fishing Championship will be held in La Crosse May 25-29, 1998. Anglers must qualify in a series of local and regional tournaments to compete in the championship. It will be the first championship held in the North, according to the *La Crosse Tribune* (1-15-97).

Troubled Bridge Dropped

Stillwater, Minn. — For the last decade environmental groups have worried that a new bridge across the St. Croix River might be an eyesore, an environmental problem and encourage rapid development immediately across the river in Wisconsin. Officials ignored their protests and designed a new, four-lane, \$60 million bridge that would cross the river diagonally about a mile downriver from the 65-year-old, two-lane lift bridge in downtown Stillwater. In the last week of 1996 the National Park Service agreed with the environmentalists and stopped the bridge.

"The massive structure would adversely affect the natural and historic scene, altering the scenic qualities of this segment of the river more than any development since designation as a national wild and scenic riverway," explained William Schenk, Midwest Area director of the National Park Service.

The St. Croix was among the first rivers accepted into the Wild and Scenic Rivers program, in 1972. The purpose of the program, which is administered by the Park Service, is

to protect the environmental and cultural qualities of designated rivers.

Last June the Sierra Club and the Voyageurs Regional National Park Association filed suit to prevent construction of the new bridge. They preferred that any new bridge be built near the old bridge.

The Stillwater area, on both sides of the river, is under increasing development pressure because of urban sprawl from the nearby Twin Cities. Nevertheless, the Minnesota Transportation Department (DOT) announced on January 14 that it will demolish 64 homes already purchased and condemned as part of the cancelled project, according to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (1-16-97).

The Minnesota DOT asserts that the Park Service overextended its authority when it cancelled the project.

Confluence of Rivers

Minnesota — A new, nonprofit organization has taken on the task of protecting the streams and rivers of Minnesota. The Rivers Council of Minnesota published the first issue of its quarterly newsletter, *The Rivers Advocate*, and is looking for charter members and volunteers.

For more information contact the Rivers Council of Minnesota, P.O. Box 3000, Cass County Courthouse, Walker, MN 56484, (612) 690-0690.

Nuisances in Cyberspace

World Wide Web — Talk about problems. Want to visit a place where you can find zebra mussels, Eurasian ruffe, sea lamprey, spiny waterfleas and a bunch of other invasive species? Just fire up your web browser and go to <<http://www.ansc.purdue.edu/sgnis/>> or visit the Big River Home Page <www.big-river.com> and look for "Nonindigenous Species" in the "Interesting

River Links" section.

The site is a cooperative effort of several Sea Grant Programs in the Upper Midwest.

Resources for Educators

Educational displays about water quality are available for loan through several Wisconsin sources. Table-top and standing units illustrate pollution, waste storage, gardens, erosion control and other watershed issues. Call (608) 263-4720, or consult the University of Wisconsin-Extension's *Keeping Current* (Dec./Jan. 1997).

A national interactive teachers' video conference on water issues is scheduled for May 1, 1997, from 12:45 p.m. to 3 p.m. The University of Wisconsin-Cooperative Extension is sponsoring the conference. Call 1-888-WATERWI or visit <<http://www.uwex.edu/erc/ywc>>.

A new, online program for grades 3 to 12 will follow the Mississippi's flood stages this spring. Sponsored by

(Current Events continued on page 6)

Big River™

Big River (ISSN 1070-8340) is published monthly by Big River, 701 1/2 East Fourth Street, Suite 203, Winona, MN 55987; (507) 454-5949; fax: (507) 454-2133; e-mail: bigriver@aol.com; web site: <http://www.big-river.com>

Reggie McLeod	editor/publisher
Pamela Eyden	assistant editor
Molly McGuire	associate editor
Mary Feathergill	bookkeeper
Jayne L. Stokke	graphic artist
Joshua Jacobs	systems analyst

Subscriptions are \$28 for one year, \$50 for two years or \$2.75 per single issue. Send subscriptions, single copy orders and change-of-address requests to Big River, PO Box 741, Winona, MN 55987.

Second-class postage paid at Winona, MN.

POSTMASTER: send change-of-address requests to Big River, PO Box 741, Winona, MN 55987.

Big River, Volume, 5, Number 2, copyright © February 1997. Reproduction in whole or in part without written permission of the publisher is prohibited. Printed on recycled paper.

OnlineClass and Hamline University's Center for Global Environmental Education, *Rivers of Life: Mississippi Adventure*, will feature reports from schools all over the world and from river experts. The program runs from March 10 to May 9, and the fee is \$120 per classroom. Visit the Web site for more information: <<http://www.usinternet.com/onlineclass>>, or e-mail tbt@onlineclass.com.

There is still time for submissions to the second *River of Words*, a national poster and poetry contest for students in grades K-12. Sponsored by International Rivers Network (IRN) and supported by the Library of Congress and the U.S. Poet Laureate, *River of Words* encourages children to explore their own watershed and express what they see, think and feel. This year's deadline is February 15. IRN has developed a popular *River of Words* curriculum as well, with a 40-page *Teacher's Guide* full of activities, resources and ideas. Call (510) 848-1155 for details, or visit the IRN's Web site at <<http://www.irn.org>>.

The Coulee Region Sierra Club of La Crosse, Wis., has awarded five environmental grants for hands-on, student projects. One group of elementary students in Black River Falls will be building a model of the Mississippi.

Egged On

Williston, N.D. — The ancient paddlefish may be facing yet a new threat — an increasing demand for eggs due to a worldwide caviar shortage, brought on by depleted stocks of Russian wild sturgeon. Paddlefish caviar taken from the Missouri and Yellowstone rivers near Williston, North Dakota, apparently measure up to Russia's second-best, Sevruga caviar, but aren't quite as tasty as the Beluga. The *Minot Daily News* claims that North Dakota caviar has more than doubled in price in recent years, according to *River Crossings* (Nov./Dec. 1996).

Meanwhile, the 134 countries that

signed the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) will be meeting this June to discuss changes to trading regulations. The United States is joining Germany in an effort to control illegal trade in caviar and to protect Russian sturgeon populations.

Also, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has proposed listing the timber rattlesnake, all 12 species of box turtles and the alligator snapping turtle on Appendix II of the treaty, which establishes limits on trade, according to the Environment News Service (1-14-97).

Feminine Fish

A study from the United Kingdom has found that male fish living near sewage outfalls have been feminized by human female hormones in the effluent. The males started producing egg yolk protein. Apparently, the fish were affected by very low levels of hormones — less than one billionth of a gram per liter. The UK Environment Agency has already ordered water companies to try to neutralize hormones in sewage works, according to *River Crossings* (Nov./Dec. 1996).

Green Star for Dakota

St. Paul, Minn. — The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency has awarded Dakota Barge Service, St. Paul, a "Green Star" for initiating and completing environmental audits of its above-ground storage tanks, spill plans and water-quality management plan. Dakota cleans and repairs barges at Mile 833.6 in the Twin Cities. Green Stars are given to businesses that take steps on their own to comply with environmental laws.

Dumper Confesses

Baton Rouge, La. — A port captain for Midstream Fuel Services Inc., Baton Rouge, was sentenced Jan. 3 to four months in a halfway house and four months of home incarceration for a guilty plea to a felony count of violating the Clean Water Act. Midstream dumped boat waste into the

river instead of properly disposing of it on shore, according to the Environment News Service on the Envirolink Network (1-13-97).

To the Magic Kingdom

La Crosse, Wis. — An Upper Mississippi business has built the new stern-wheeler for the Magic Kingdom in Walt Disney World. Skipperliner of La Crosse, Wis., took nine months and more than 60 full-time workers to construct the 122-foot, 450-passenger *Liberty Belle*, according to *The Waterways Journal* (12-23-96).

Cows on Ice

Dubuque, Iowa — Seven holsteins took a four-hour afternoon stroll down the frozen Mississippi in early January, providing local authorities with an interesting jurisdiction issue to solve. The bovine wanderers remained on the loose until dark when a Dubuque County resident claimed them and somehow coaxed them off the river.

One remained missing, according to the *Dubuque Telegraph Herald* (1-3-97).

Paddle to Galena

Galena, Ill. — Visitors to Galena may have an opportunity to cruise down the Galena River to the Mississippi on a new passenger vessel this summer. John Vize, an East Moline boat captain, won permission from the city council to dock a yet-to-be-built boat near the city's levee, breaking a 30-year ban on water traffic into Galena. Vize still needs the approval of the Coast Guard, which controls navigation on the Galena, but will not need the approval of the Army Corps of Engineers, since he is not planning a permanent dock.

The proposed boat will be 36 by 10 feet and carry about 35 passengers, according to the *Dubuque Telegraph Herald* (1-14-97).

Resources

River Network has published a handbook for new river and watershed organizations. *Starting Up* is available for \$25. Call (503) 241-3506 or e-mail rivernet@igc.apc.org.

The Scientific Assessment and Strategy Team (SAST) has published the third volume in its series on the ecology of the Upper Mississippi, Illinois, and Missouri rivers. For a copy of *Overview of River-Floodplain Ecology in the Upper Mississippi River Basin*, contact the Government Printing Office, Superintendent of Documents, Mail Stop: SSOP, Washington, DC 20402-9328. They are also on the Web at <http://edcwww.cr.usgs.gov/sast-home.html>.

John Hartford fans can get closer to the pilot/river songwriter through his Web site, <http://www.techpublishing.com/hartford/> or check out the *John Hartford Newsletter* by calling (615) 520-1143.

Pool 5 Planning

Buffalo City, Wis. — Like most of the pools in the Upper Mississippi, Pool 5 is apparently filling in with sand, but the process appears to be accelerating in the last five or six years, according to local river users.

The Army Corps of Engineers held a meeting in Buffalo City on January 23 to discuss channel maintenance needs and to ask local river users how to improve and protect environmental and recreational features in Pool 5.

Most of the discussion focused on backwater channels that have become blocked by sand shoals in recent years. The audience generally agreed that the back channel along Buffalo City and Spring Lake, downriver, are steadily filling in. They also observed that the river bottom used to be mostly muddy and supported plants, but is now mostly sandy and without plant life.

Separate work is already being done in the pool in Spring Lake and the Weaver Bottoms. This project,

which deals with the rest of Pool 5, will continue in its "problem appraisal" phase until March, then a feasibility study will continue until September 1998, followed by a year of engineering and design. Actual construction is scheduled for 1999-2001.

Park Improvements

Bellevue, Iowa — A city that already has one of the nicest riverfronts on the Upper Mississippi will be sprucing up part of it this year. Bellevue's Riverfront Park Improvement Project will add a winding brick pathway, benches, ornamental light poles, prairie grass and flowers to the stretch of park between Market and High streets.

Not Permitted

St. Paul, Minn. — City officials didn't get the required stormwater permits for the Civic Center and Wabasha Bridge projects on the Mississippi River in downtown St. Paul, according to an article in *Riverview Times* (1-20-97).

The permits require contractors to protect against soil erosion at construction projects. Officials of the Minnesota Board of Soil and Water Resources noticed erosion problems at the bridge project last spring. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) sent a warning letter to the city regarding the Civic Center construction.

"They were into that construction for over a year without being legal," said Keith Cherryhomes of the MPCA.

Pollution from nonpoint sources is the leading cause of water degradation in the Midwest, he said. In addition to soil, it can carry fertilizer, heavy metals and pesticides into the river.

Get a Boat

Minnesota — The Land of 10,000 Lakes was the land of 758,666 boats last year. Minnesota's boat registrations increased 1.3 percent (9,770)

from 1995 to 1996.

Jet skis took the biggest jump, up 5,449, or 30 percent, to 23,556. Registrations of fiberglass or plastic canoes and kayaks increased 5 percent, or 2,500, to 49,777. Aluminum outboards 16 to less than 26 feet increased 4 percent, or 6,262, to 175,477. The number of small sailboats and outboards shorter than 16 feet long decreased.

In 1995 Minnesota's per capita boat registration was the highest in the nation, one boat for six residents. Wisconsin was next highest, with one boat per 10 residents.

Traffic Forecast Down

Commercial traffic on the Upper Mississippi is likely to increase, according to a new report, but the projected increase is much slower than a previous projection.

A contractor prepared "Waterway Traffic Forecasts for the Upper Mississippi River Basin" for the Army Corps of Engineers' Navigation Study, which is considering the need to increase barge traffic in the next century. Using confidential interviews, computer modeling and other information, the forecast concluded that commercial river traffic will increase at a 1.1 percent annual rate from the year 2000 to 2050. This could have a big effect on the Navigation Study, because the Corps' 1992 Reconnaissance report predicted a growth rate of 2 percent, according to an article in the *UMRCC Newsletter* (Nov./Dec. 1996).

Deformed Frogs

St. Paul, Minn. — The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) is being criticized for not requesting funding from the legislature to continue research on deformed frogs found across the state, according to the *St. Paul Pioneer Press* (1-28-97).

The first group of deformed frogs was discovered by schoolchildren near Le Sueur in August 1995. The

(Current Events continues on page 8)



River Calendar

Special Events & Festivals

February

- 1 Candlelight Ski, 5:30 p.m. - 10 p.m., Wildcat Mountain State Park, Ontario, Wis., (608) 337-4775.
- 1-2 Winter Carnival, Winona, Minn.
- 8 Candlelight Ski, 5:30 p.m. - 7:30 p.m., Root River State Trail, Lanesboro, Minn., (507) 467-2552.
- 8-9 Ski jumping tournament, Westby, Wis.
- 9 Snowshoe Hike, 1 p.m., Effigy Mounds National Monument, Marquette, Iowa, (319) 873-3491.
- 14-16 International Eelpout Festival, Walker, Minn.
- 15 Sweetheart Ski Stroll, 6 p.m., Wyalusing State Park, Bagley, Wis., (608) 996-2261.
- 18 Trumpeter swan watching, Monticello, Minn., reservations by Feb. 7, (612) 472-4911.
- 22 Grumpy Old Men Festival, Wabasha, Minn., 1-800-565-4158.
- 22-23 Winter carnival, Galena, Ill., 1-800-397-1320.

March

- 1-2 Eagle Watch, Winona, Minn., evening program followed by bus trip, 1-800-657-4972 or (507) 452-2272.
- 15-16; 22-23; 29 Maple syruping in your backyard, Ft. Snelling State Park, St. Paul, Minn., (612) 726-9247.
- 16 Soar with the Eagles special program, Wabasha, Minn., viewing deck staffed 1 p.m. - 3 p.m. Sundays through March, 1-800-565-4158 or (612) 565-3918.

Exhibitions

February

- 6-9 La Crosse (Wis.) Sport, Boat & Travel Show.
- 12-16 Home and Garden Show, Minneapolis.
- 19-23 St. Cloud (Minn.) Camp & Travel Expo, (320) 255-7272.
- 21-23 Tri-State Boat Show, Dubuque, Iowa, (319) 589-4258.
- 25-27 Farm Show, St. Cloud, Minn.

Meetings & Hearings

February

- 6-7 Upper Mississippi River Summit (Big River Partnership), Airport-Marriot, St. Louis, Mo., (612) 290-5303.

- 7 Clean Up our River Environment (CURE), 7 p.m., Granite Falls, Minn., (320) 269-2105.
- 10 Sierra Club, St. Croix Valley group, 6:30 p.m., Stillwater, Minn.
- 13 Minnesota-Wisconsin Boundary Area Commission, La Crosse, Wis., (612) 436-7131.
- 13 Lower Wisconsin State Riverway Board, 5 p.m., Muscoda, 1-800-221-3792.
- 18 Friends of the Upper Mississippi, 7 p.m., Winona, Minn., to support the Trempealeau and Upper Miss wildlife refuges, (507) 452-4232.

Workshops & Conferences

February

- 6-7 Farmer-Led Watershed Initiatives Conference, Mankato, Minn., (612) 379-5980.
- 14 Project Wild educators workshop, Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, Finland, Minn., 1-800-523-2733.
- 19 Upper Mississippi River Basin Association (UMRBA) Annual Meeting, Chicago, (612) 224-2880.

March

- 1 Tri-State Forest Steward Conference, management and care of woodlands, Sinsinawa (Wis.) Mound Center, \$18, pre-register by Feb. 15. Info at Cooperative Extension Services, DNR forestry offices, or Linda DePaul, (608) 266-2388.
- 11-13 Upper Mississippi River Conservation Committee, Winona, Minn., (612) 345-3365.
- 15 Safety in Paddlesport Conference,

resources and education for canoe and kayak trip leaders, 8 a.m. - 4:45 p.m., College of DuPage, Glen Ellyn, Ill., (630) 942-2356.

- 22 Restoring Our Urban Waters, Citizens for a Better Environment watershed conference, 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., First Universalist Society, Mpls, Minn., (612) 824-8637, ext. 222, or cbelake@igc.apc.org. ☸

(Current Events continued from page 7)

state legislature gave the MPCA \$151,000 to investigate the matter last year. Over the summer deformities were confirmed at 21 sites in the state and reported in many other. The most common deformity is extra back legs and deformed legs.

Theories about the cause of the deformities abound, but none have been proven. Several other states, including Wisconsin and Missouri, have reported similar deformities, prompting some federal involvement. Many people worry that whatever is causing the deformities in frogs may also be causing deformities in humans and other animals. ☸

February Almanac

By Kenny Salwey

I've tried the time-honored, cabin-fever antidotes, like sorting tackle boxes, cleaning the shotgun, varnishing canoe paddles, checking life vests and paging through outdoor catalogs. Now and then comes a day or two of thawing weather. Beavers and muskrats sit near weak spots in the ice munching on fresh tubers and twigs. A family of river otters run and slide on their bellies, making troughs in the snow, playing tag. Raccoon, possum, and skunk tracks crisscross the backwaters. Mild nights draw them from hollow trees and bark dens in search of food and romance. Chickadees whistle their late winter song: "chee-bee-pee-bee."

Some backwater spring holes are filled with suffocated fish. Underwater vegetation, deep snow, thick ice and cloudy days have robbed the water of oxygen. Half-eaten fish lie among signs of mink, raccoon, otter, possum, fox, coyote and the ever present clean-up crew, the crows.

Soon the snows fall and Arctic winds return. Ho hum, another day with a cup of hot chocolate in hand, staring out the window as the snow falls and the wind devils whirl and dance across the big river.

Patience, my friends. The big river will soon awaken. ☸